



Annual Internal Review

This report covers the period of 7/1/2019 to 6/30/2020

COMMISSION ON VETERAN AFFAIRS

An election was held in January 2020 to elect new officers whose term expired as follows, Doris Williams appointed by Mayor Steve Adler was elected President of the Commission on Veterans Affairs to fill the expired term of President Jason Denny. Commissioner Manuel Jimenez appointed by Councilmember Sabino Renteria was elected Vice President to fill the expired term of Vice President Pete Salazar.

The Commission on Veterans Affairs mission statement as authorized by Austin City Code 2-1-46 is:

Serve as an advisor body to the council concerning the wellbeing of military veterans in the Austin Area. The Commission shall evaluate and recommend programs, policies, and practices designed to alleviate veteran's difficulties in meeting basic needs, obtaining housing, employment, and comprehensive mental health assistance; and act as a central clearinghouse for information relating to the status of veterans in the Austin community.

The Commission's mission is within its scope and objectives to meet mission goals. The Commission implemented the following goals and objectives to meet its mission during the covered period and are as follows:

GOALS

- Fund a Veterans Resource Center
- Implement a Veteran's/Community Court
- Relocate Veteran's Plaza to Vic Mathias Shores
- Obtain information on transitioning active duty personnel moving to the Austin area

Annual Review and Work Plan 2020

OBJECTIVES

- Conduct community meetings for feedback on the effectiveness; pros and cons of a One Stop Veterans Resource Center
- Determine judicial authority for a Veteran's Court
- Take the necessary steps to relocate Veteran's Plaza to Vic Mathias Shores
- Work with area military establishments to gather information for a Transition Assistance Program (TAP) that identifies military personnel transitioning into the Austin and surrounding community

ACCOMPLISHMENTS

No one could have projected or imagined in March 2020 that the world would be hit by a pandemic killing hundreds of thousands of people in the United States and around the world. The resulting accomplishments in this Annual Review are reflective of the effects and modifications by the Governor of the State of Texas and local authority for the rest of this report year ending June 30, 2020.

It must be taken into consideration the status of this Annual Review in the context of conditions that existed at the beginning of the year and now, i.e., Pre-Covid-19 Coronavirus and Post Covid-19 Coronavirus. Accomplishments were affected by a total shutdown and national disaster declaration in March 2020. Prior to the disaster the Commission on Veterans Affairs addressed the issue of a Veterans Resource Center as one of its goals and set out to determine whether data supports co-locating various veterans' services that already exists in the community into a new One Stop Veterans Resource Center, VRC. Several non-profits in the community were already supplying veteran services.

A Needs Assessment survey conducted by John Boerstler, Combined Arms, a non-profit agency, headquartered in Houston, Texas, presented to the Commission on Veterans Affairs and the City of Austin. Several Commissioners attended the briefing by Mr. Boerstler to members of the City Council. As of this report no action has been taken by the City of Austin. The disposition on creation of the One Stop VRC remains pending. As a result of the disaster declaration in March 2020 the One Stop Veterans Resource Center was put on hold as of this report.

As it pertains to the Veterans' Court two Commissioners with background and knowledge in the legal system addressed the issue of veterans in the legal system. They researched

Annual Review and Work Plan 2020

the organizational structure of the courts in Travis county to determine jurisdictional authority when veterans enter the judicial system. Findings show that some court laws

were too strict, unfavorable to veteran, and should be loosened to better serve veterans. Commissioners agreed that research into courts in Travis county is necessary for collaborate when a veteran enters the judicial court system.

The project to move Veteran's Plaza to Vic Mathis Shores is still ongoing under negotiation and because of Covid-19 likely to take 6-9 months to complete. This will push the completion date of this project to sometimes next year. COVID-19 has affected many projects completion deadlines.

During the January 15, 2020 Regular Meeting, Sam Haytham of Kiro Action, a newly formed nonprofit, presented a plan designed to alleviate veteran homelessness in the City of Austin. Commissioner Pete Salazar, a sponsor, volunteered to follow-up and visit a prototype.

Covid-19 Coronavirus presented difficulty to conduct normal operations. Under state and city direction all meetings of more than 10 individual were moved to videoconferencing until further notice or the disaster is lifted. A Special Call Meeting was held on July 6, 2020 via videoconferencing to finalize the Kiro Action Plan. The Commission voted to approve a Recommendation to the City Council of Mr. Haytham's plan.

ANNUAL REVIEW GOALS – 2020-2021

The following Goals for Annual Review 2020-2021 are below. Some Goals for year ending June 30, 2020 specifically those projects that were underway prior to the March 2020 are carried over to Annual Review June 30, 2021:

- Establish a Work Group for the Transition Assistance Program (TAP) Pilot Program
- Submit the Recommendation for Kiro Action Plan for Homeless Veterans
- Complete the move of Veteran's Plaza to Vic Mathias Shores
- Follow-up Department of Military and Veterans Affairs
- Update Bylaws to reflect the Commission's vote to change monthly meetings to bi-monthly meetings

This concludes the Annual Review 2019-2020 Report.

Doris Williams, Chairperson
Commission on Veterans Affairs